

the long term survival of the human race.<sup>5</sup> This 12% level is based on the ecological rule of thumb that 50% of species can be retained even if 90% of the original intact habitat is gone.<sup>6</sup> Clearly though, any target that would accept the loss of up to half of the ecological heritage of our planet must be viewed as an emergency minimum. Yet given the human-driven rate of change currently affecting our biosphere, even such a minimalist target for the retention of natural areas is going to be difficult to achieve in the near future. But achieve it we must or face the consequences of ecological disintegration.

### **b) The Solution: Conserving Biodiversity**

In summer 1992, Prime Minister Mulroney recognized this developing peril and demonstrated international environmental leadership when he was the first to sign the Biodiversity Convention in Rio de Janeiro and pledged to fulfill its goals in Canada. Simply stated, conserving biological diversity involves two complementary strategies:

- 1) Completing a network of pristine areas.
- 2) Improving resource management practices on the rest of the landscape.

This two-pronged approach underlies the vision of sustainable development contained in the Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future'. It has been endorsed by Canada's national conservation community and is reflected in conservation strategies produced by many provincial roundtables on the environment and economy.

By itself, a pristine areas system is not sufficient to conserve Canada's biological diversity. We must also ensure that human activity on the rest of our lands and waters maintains their productive capacity. Nevertheless, if we want to retain our rich heritage of species, habitats and genetic information, it is essential that we preserve examples now of the full range of Canada's natural ecosystems. Accordingly, this report assesses the progress being made to accomplish completion of our pristine areas system and thus fulfillment of Canada's international biodiversity commitments.

## **WILDERNESS: CANADIAN'S BIRTHRIGHT UNDER THREAT**

Canada is the second largest nation by area in the world. We Canadians think of our land as being vast and pristine. Core to the Canadian psyche is the concept of wilderness. Our country was shaped by pioneers homesteading in the great woods of Ontario or the broad prairies. We are raised on stories of the explorers who traversed the wilds of our mountains